EVESHAM POLICE

MAY 19TH- JUNE 2ND 2002

Evesham Township Police Department
Incident Report – Abandoned Missile Installation Fatalities
Location: Former Nike missile battery site, wooded area near Briarwood neighborhood
Jurisdiction: Marlton, New Jersey
Reporting Agency: Evesham Township Police Department
Report Type: Multiple Death Investigation / Site Safety Closure
Report Date: June 2002

I. Overview

This report documents two separate fatal incidents occurring at an abandoned Cold War–era missile facility located within wooded land adjacent to the Briarwood residential neighborhood in Marlton, New Jersey. The incidents occurred on May 19, 2002, and June 2, 2002, respectively.

Both incidents took place within or near the former Nike missile battery installation, a decommissioned military defense site that has remained unused for several decades. The property contains deteriorating surface structures as well as underground bunker complexes accessible through ladder shafts and stairwell entrances.

Due to the hazardous condition of the structures and evidence that members of the public had been accessing the property through informal trails, the township initiated closure procedures following the second fatality.

II. Incident #1

Case Type: Death Investigation (Suicide)
Date: May 19, 2002
Time Reported: Approximately 3:47 PM - 13 Light Horse Court

Initial Call

On May 19, 2002, the Evesham Township Police Department received a report from two civilians who had been walking along a wooded trail leading toward the abandoned missile installation near the Briarwood neighborhood.

The callers reported detecting a strong odor resembling decomposing organic material coming from an area of woods near the perimeter of the base property.

According to statements obtained by responding officers, the reporting individuals initially left the area but later returned along the trail in an attempt to locate the source of the odor.

While searching the wooded area near the abandoned facility, the individuals observed what appeared to be a human body suspended from a tree.

Emergency services were immediately contacted.

Police Response

Officers arrived on scene shortly after the call was received. The area surrounding the tree line was secured and the reporting parties were escorted away from the immediate scene.
A preliminary examination confirmed that the body was that of a teenage male.
The individual was found hanging from a branch approximately 15–20 feet from the tree trunk using a rope secured above head height.
Officers reported clear signs of advanced decomposition consistent with a body having remained exposed for multiple days.
A perimeter was established while investigators documented the scene.

Victim Identification

The deceased was later identified as **Jacob Lee**, age 17.
Identification was confirmed through personal identification located on the victim and subsequent confirmation by family members.
The victim was reported missing several days prior to discovery.

Scene Observations

Investigators documented the following conditions:

- The victim was located within a wooded area approximately 200 yards from the perimeter of the missile site.
- No immediate evidence of struggle was found in the surrounding area.
- No additional persons were present in the vicinity.
- Personal belongings belonging to the victim were found nearby.

Medical examination and investigative findings later concluded that the death was consistent with suicide.
An officer involved in the response later stated:
“The location was extremely isolated. It’s not an area where people would normally pass unless they were specifically heading toward the abandoned site.”
The body was removed later that afternoon after documentation and medical examination procedures were completed.

III. Incident #2

Case Type: Death Investigation
Date: June 2, 2002
Time Reported: Approximately 11:18 AM

Initial Discovery

On June 2, 2002, authorities were notified of a second possible fatality at the same abandoned missile installation while gathering information about the first incident while already at the base.
Responding personnel were directed to a ladder stairwell structure that provided access to the underground section of the former military facility.
The body of a male individual was discovered within the stairwell shaft leading into the bunker complex.
The structure consists of a vertical ladder and narrow stairwell descending into underground corridors originally used to access missile storage and operations rooms.

Police Response

Officers from the Evesham Township Police Department arrived on scene and secured the immediate area.
Due to the confined nature of the shaft and limited visibility, additional personnel were required to safely retrieve the body.
Investigators reported that the victim was located several feet below the surface level within the stairwell.
The confined environment and deteriorating infrastructure made access difficult for emergency personnel.
A responding officer noted:
"These underground areas were never designed for public access. The structures are unstable and poorly ventilated. Entering them without proper equipment is extremely dangerous."

Victim Identification

The deceased was identified as **Riley Morris**, age 19.
At the time of the initial investigation, authorities stated that the cause of death had not yet been determined.
Investigators continued examining the circumstances surrounding the incident, including whether the individual entered the underground facility voluntarily or fell into the stairwell.

IV. Site Safety Assessment

Following the second incident, officials conducted a safety assessment of the abandoned installation.
The site was determined to present several hazards, including:

- Unsecured underground access points
- Rusted and deteriorating metal ladders
- Unstable stairwells
- Poor air circulation within enclosed underground chambers
- Lack of lighting or structural maintenance

Evidence suggested that the property had been accessed repeatedly by members of the public through informal walking trails.
Several pathways from nearby residential areas allowed individuals to reach the abandoned base without encountering barriers or signage.

V. Township Action

Following the second fatality, township officials initiated emergency closure procedures for the property.
Public works crews sealed multiple entrances leading into the underground bunker complex.
Actions taken included:

- Installation of metal barriers over ladder shafts
- Securing stairwell entrances
- Placement of physical obstacles along perimeter entry points
- Closure and rerouting of the wooded trail connecting the Briarwood neighborhood to the site

These actions were intended to prevent further public access and reduce the risk of accidents or trespassing.

VI. Statement from Mayor

Mayor Gus Tamburro issued a statement following the second fatality.

“Our residents should not have to question their safety in our town.”
The mayor also described the events as:
“One of the most tragic, devastating, and bizarre cases in Marlton.”
Township leadership confirmed that additional monitoring of the property would continue to ensure the closures remain effective.

VII. Community Response

Residents living near the wooded area expressed concern following the incidents.
Multiple residents reported that teenagers had occasionally explored the abandoned facility in previous years.
One nearby resident stated:
“People knew the old missile base was back there, but most of us had no idea how dangerous it had become.”
Another resident said the closure of the trails was necessary.
“After two deaths in the same place, it’s clear something had to be done.”

VIII. Current Status

As of the completion of this report:

- The death of Jacob Lee has been ruled a suicide.
- The cause of death for Riley Morris remained under investigation at the time of reporting.
- Access points to the underground missile facility have been sealed.
- The wooded trail leading to the property from the Briarwood neighborhood has been closed.

Authorities continue to advise residents to avoid the abandoned structures due to severe safety risks.
The former Cold War installation remains secured pending any future decisions regarding the long-term use of the property.

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